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C-J reporting job may 'cover' to a CIA

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Courier-Journal Staff Writer

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WASHINGTON — When 28-year-old Robert H. Campbell was hired as a Courier-Journal reporter in December 1964, he couldn't type and knew little about news writing.

Campbell was a mystery.

He lived in the YMCA and was paid \$125 a week. But he could afford to fly home to St. Louis every other weekend to see his wife and children.

He never seemed interested in being

a reporter and drifted off as quietly as he came.

Now, evidence developed during a newspaper investigation strongly indicates that Campbell was an undercover agent for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The investigation shows that Campbell, who was a Courier-Journal reporter from December 1964 until March 1965, apparently has been an intelligence agent since September 1959.

Two former newspaper executives have made conflicting statements about whether The Courier-Journal cooperated

with the CIA in putting Campbell on the payroll.

Benjamin F. Reeves, then the managing editor, said that Norman E. Isaacs, then the executive editor of The Courier-Journal and The Louisville Times, told him that Campbell was hired as a result of a CIA request to Isaacs.

Isaacs, the only person involved in the hiring of Campbell, denied Reeves' statement.

Isaacs, however, did not follow normal personnel procedures in hiring Campbell as a beginning reporter. Among other

things, no check was made of Campbell's background.

In its recent effort to learn about Campbell, the newspaper found that two phony foundations and two phony companies apparently were used by the CIA to provide Campbell and perhaps others with cover for their activities.

The newspaper also found that Campbell apparently used the Atlas Corp., a publicly owned American firm, as a cover for activities in Japan during the early 1970s.

years he apparently has served as an intelligence agent is not known.

The Courier-Journal was unable to determine if he used his newspaper background for a cover during overseas assignments.

It is likely that in the early 1960s Campbell was involved in translation work.

Efforts to question Campbell, who owns a townhouse in McLean, Va., five minutes from CIA headquarters, were unsuccessful. His wife rebuffed a reporter's repeated requests to talk with her husband.

Asked if her husband is a CIA agent, Mrs. Campbell said:

"If he was, I wouldn't blab it to you."

CIA spokesman Angus Thuermer refused to confirm or deny that Campbell works for the CIA.

"We just can't say anything about allegations of newsmen doing this, that or the other," he said.

He also said the CIA is "pretty bloody goosey" about the unmasking of CIA agents because the assassination of agent

Richard Welch in Greece came after his CIA connection was reported.

"We just had his star carved on the wall here (next to 31 other stars for CIA agents killed in the line of duty)," he said.

What Campbell sought to accomplish by working as a reporter in Louisville is not clear.

"Cover has been our sole concern" in placing agents on newspapers, said Thuermer.

Sen. Walter (Dee) Huddleston, D-Ky., whose Senate intelligence subcommittee is investigating CIA links to the press, said he knows nothing about the Campbell case.

But he theorized that Campbell "wasn't there to learn anything about the paper or even to propagandize through his writings. He was there for the purpose of cover or establishing a career that could be used as cover at a later time."

Under pressure from Congress and the news media, CIA Director George Bush recently said the CIA no longer would "enter into any paid or contractual relationship" with full-time or part-time reporters working for any U.S. news agency.

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Journal and The Louisville Times, asked that the rumor be checked out.

After an internal report concluded that Campbell could have been in the CIA, Bingham asked the CIA for confirmation. The CIA refused to provide it.

Recently, Bingham, who said he would not knowingly permit the newspaper to be used to provide cover for a CIA agent, brought the Campbell affair to the attention of Huddleston's subcommittee.

Barry Bingham Sr., who was editor and publisher of both Louisville newspapers in 1964, said he knows nothing about Campbell. He said the question of whether the newspaper should cooperate with the CIA "never arose."

Ostensibly, it was a letter from a Dallas, Texas, firm to Isaacs that resulted in Campbell's being hired as a reporter.

In the letter of Oct. 23, 1964, Herman Bulford of the Economic News Distributors said:

"We are desirous of broadening the experience of one of our junior feature writers and are interested specifically in giving him the opportunity to work for some months on a large well-known newspaper..."

"The individual we have in mind is Mr. Robert E. (sic) Campbell, who was born April 10, 1936, in Jackson, Michigan. He received an MA in history from the University of Chicago in 1959; in March 1960, he went to Kenya on a research grant from the African Research Foundation and spent the next three years studying the language and the history of the country.